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ABSTRACT

The traditional college required remedial reading course has many shortcomings: students are stigmatized by forced placement and resent the course; dropout rates are higher; and high-risk students who take the course take longer to complete degrees and take longer to shed the high-risk label. The skills taught tend to be speed, vocabulary, and comprehension which are taught in traditional ways and are often unrelated to those skills needed to understand college textbooks. Also college reading teachers may be untrained in modern theory and research, lack skills in teaching adults, and usually are not knowledgeable about what other faculty members consider academic literacy. Courses are rarely systematically evaluated so there is no incentive to change topics, or the way they are taught. There is also little evidence of these courses improving reading skills or college success. The best solution is to integrate reading, writing, and study skills directly into the courses. Teachers should design innovative curriculum and teaching strategies in reading and writing for learning which combine language activities and rely on their interaction for learning. Other alternatives are to revive college preparatory programs and summer programs that offer interdisciplinary courses. (Contains 68 references.) (RS)

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THE DISMAL STATE OF REQUIRED DEVELOPMENTAL READING PROGRAMS: ROOTS, CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

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Research findings on the effectiveness of requiring college developmental reading courses reveal that they often impact negatively on the students they are supposed to benefit. The stigma of taking a remedial course, the inappropiate use of placement tests courses and materials that are unchallenging and teachers who areunaccustomed to teaching adults and know little about what college faculty expect all contribute to the problem. As a result developmental students are more likely to drop out, have lower self-confidence and take longer to comlete degrees.

College administrators have long assumed that reading courses are necessary and helpful. But, they rarely require these courses to be systematically evaluated to determine their outcomes. Reading program directors usually don't report on how developmental students fare in mainstream courses. The few follow-up studies that have been done fail to show that there is any difference between the reading skills and/or academic achievement of those who took developmental reading courses and high risk students who should have taken the courses but didn't.

On the one hand, nobody denies that many students need to improve their reading skills -- administrators, faculty, students themselves, all agree that good reading skills are essential to successfully complete college courses.

In fact the need to improve reading skills is intensifying as more than half of our high school graduates enter college, and more than one quarter of the freshmen class are held for developmental reading courses. Why? Many of today's college entrants did not take college preparatory programs and/or made poor grades in the high school courses they did take (Smittle, 1996). Others are high school dropouts or are adults returning to school after a hiatus of many years.

On the other hand, there is little evidence that taking required developmental reading courses makes a significant difference in students' reading ability or college achievement.(Losak, 1972;Grant & Hoeber, 1978, Maxwell, 1979; Richardson & others 1982; Keimig, 1983; Bohr, 1994-95; Roueche & Roueche,1994).

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

A number of studies describe the negative effects of forced placement in a college reading course that include increased drop-outs, decreased self-confidence, lowered morale, and retarded the student's progress in completing a degree. (Maxwell, 1979;Keimig, 1983; Dimon, 1993; Utterback, 1989). For example, Dimon (1993) found that four years later, high risk students who took a reading course were 20 credits behind high risk students who did not take a reading course but took a general education course instead. (They lost far more than the 3 credits from taking one reading course.) And some studies show that for high-risk students, taking mainstream courses improves reading test scores, retention, and academic grades significantly while taking a developmental reading course does not (Losak, 1972; Bohr, 1995-6; Tarabon, 1997, Dimon, 1993).

A recent example is Adelman's 1996 National Center for Education Statistics report on a 10 year follow-up study of developmental students is the latest in the long history of studies that have found college developmental reading courses ineffective. Based on his follow-up study, Adelman recommends that reading courses be restricted to community colleges since they teach most of the developmental courses and they know how to help determined students obtain degrees. He concedes that students can improve in math and writing in courses in four year colleges, because these skills are readily fixable but he feels reading deficits signal comprehensive literacy problems that lower the student's chances of completing a degree. He further argues that four year colleges are not very efficient in handling reading cases and we are defrauding students if we pretend otherwise. "Community colleges are better suited than four-year colleges to address a combination of multiple remedial needs and a lingering adolescent attitude toward education — but the comprehensive literacy problems that force students to take remedial reading courses require solutions more far-reaching than even community college can provide " (Adelman, 1996, p56.

Earlier researchers were somewhat kinder. In 1978. Losak (1972) found there were no subsequent academic gains for high-risk students who took a developmental reading course compared to a control group who did not. Grant & Hoeber asked whether basic skills programs were working and answered that although the basic skills instructors were working very hard indeed, there was little evidence that the courses were successful. Ruth Keimig in 1983 declared that skills should be integrated directly into academic courses and that stand-alone developmental courses were the least cost-effective way of providing academic support help to students. But these warnings have made little difference for colleges have continued to add required reading courses while avoiding their evaluation.

Mary Dimon (1993) traced the history of college remedial reading courses under California's Master Plan learning that although administrators from community college, state universities and the University of California regularly discussed the "remedial problem" and made recommendations about the need for evaluation and the need for change, studies were not completed, nor changes made. All that happened was that reading and study skills courses continued to proliferate universally -- expanding in all levels of public colleges over a thirty year period. Systematic evaluation was not conducted to assess the effects of participating in developmental courses on retention, drop-outs, parity, or transfer to senior colleges though these were considered high priority concerns. (Note: During that period many of us suspected that administrators did no insist on evaluating their remedial programs because they knew the outcomes would be bad.)

Although the California system's developmental reading courses usually test to determine student placement, they typically do not tests to decide whether students are ready for college-level reading. Students who complete the required sequence of courses are assumed to have gained the necessary skills. Many other systems use both pre and post-testing.

Standardized Reading Tests- Cure or Curse?

Experts have long complained that standardized reading tests are artificial, minimally useful in placing students, and punitive, but they still continue to be the primary factor determining who must take developmental reading. It is as if administrators and policy makers in their desire to fix the national reading problem, have found a panacea - an instant cure and decided that the is to give a standardized test and force students who score low to take remedial courses. Not only are individual institutions using this procedure, but a number of states, such as Florida, Texas and Tennessee, mandate reading tests and remedial courses for low scoring students in all public colleges.

The number of poor readers entering college has remained high, but little else has changed. They are still tested and put in reading courses and there is little evidence that most of today's programs are effective. There is even disagreement on whether college reading courses should be required or voluntary. Although voluntary programs have been shown to be more successful than mandatory ones, surveys show that less than one third of the students who are recommended to take remedial courses do so when they are given the option and one half believe the courses are not needed (Utterback, 1989). Since it has been difficult to show that taking courses improves reading skills, perhaps the students are right.

In the 1960's ninety-five percent of the college reading programs evaluated students' reading skills and progress with standardized tests, (Maxwell, 1979) and this is probably still true in community colleges where standardized reading tests have been adopted as a matter of convenience to place students in remedial/developmental courses. (Kerstiens, n.d)

The Nelson-Denny Reading Test (NDRT)) is the most frequently used test for pre- and post-assessment probably because it is easy and quick to administer (30 minutes), and its subscores (reading speed, vocabulary and comprehension) reflect the skills traditionally taught in college reading courses. In addition, scores can be converted to grade equivalent norms so that one can readily decide on and justify cut-off scores. In fact, for those who are naive about psychometrics, it seems like the ideal reading test.

However, critics contend that the Nelson-Denny Reading Test is the most misused and abused test in the reading field. First of all, it is not a placement test - it is a norm referenced test in that it shows how a student scores in comparison with a particular norm group. Placement tests should be criterion referenced and indicate how well a student reads, not how he or she compares with others. (Kerstiens, n.d.., 1979, 1986, 1990, 1993,; Keimig, 1983,Maxwell, 1979, 1997, Sternberg, 1991,Utterback, 1989; Wood, 1989, 1997).

Secondly, the NDRT is a highly speeded test. In fact, if students are told to read faster on the post-test, they can easily increase their scores significantly since there is no penalty for guessing. (Maxwell, 1997). [One instructor reported that when she told her students just to fill in the bubbles in the answer sheet (i.e., guess) during the last few minutes of the test, their average score jumped three grade levels.]

Speeded tests bear little relation to the kinds of reading freshmen students do in college and the NDRT measures a kind of artificial or test-specific kind of reading, not realistic reading. Kerstiens adds that although time-critical assessment instruments unfairly appraise students' reading skills, a look at the NDRT content should discourage anyone from administering it to students. -- The 100 vocabulary words, many of which are obsolete are tested out of context within a 10 minute time limit that encourages students to guess; the 600 word reading passages followed by questions are invariably "bookish" including topics like Greek poetry, Swinburne, Browning, Shelley, Virgil - all written in conceptually dense prose. Kerstiens asks "Is this the kind of prose we want to inflict on thousands of entering and reentering developmental students? (n.d., pge1.)

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Despite its obvious inadequacies the NDRT remains a favorite. "Ironically, the popularity of speeded reading comprehension tests, like the Nelson Dennry Reading Test, continues to be inversely proportional to the negative comments of critics."(Tilliman as quoted by Kerstiens, n.d.,p.1).

Note: Early in the development of mental measurements, psychometrists found that by controlling the amount of time students spent taking the test, they could add more items thus increasing the reliability of the test (Guildofrd, 1939).

Other standardized reading tests share the same weaknesses in that they contain short passages with multiple choice questions and are closely timed while in reading textbooks, students must read longer, more difficult chapters with no time constraints.

Sternberg (1991) further cautions that standardized reading tests reveal only a narrow measure of student aptitude and achievement and that reading test scores provide not only an incomplete but distorted picture of how students actually read. He describes other differences between reading as it is done on tests and reading in school explaining that on tests, reading passages are short and recall is immediate; in school, reading passages are moderate to long and recall is delayed. On tests, recall is entirely intentional while in school, recall is incidental. Comprehension on tests is based on a single type of question, usually multiple choice; in school multiple assessments are made. Reading passages on tests are often boring, and tend to be emotionally neutral which may not be true in school reading. On tests, the reading situation minimizes distraction while in school, there may be many distractions.

Also tests evaluate reading for a single purpose-- that is, students try to get a high score. Depending on the type of reading test, students might read more carefully (when there are penalties for guessing) or more carelessly (when speed of response is important) than they would in normal reading. Furthermore, reading tests measure the reader's ability to evaluate, but not to construct arguments (Sternberg, 1991).

The problems are compounded when single test scores are used in forced placement of students into remedial/developmental courses. Although some students are undoubtedly helped by taking reading courses, the drop-out rate for required reading courses is as high as 48 percent (Utterback, 1989). Many students do not want to take special classes for which they receive no credit. and Utterback concludes that the misuse of tests may discourage students and drive them away from college although

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administrators may not be aware of this because there are very few evaluative studies or reviews of results.

Despite the fact that single test scores have little or no value, (Morante, 1994) placement in college reading courses still relies heavily on single test scores. Multiple, criteria are seldom used to decide who must take the remedial courses. Utterback (1989) suggests that one solution would be to substitute advising ranges for cut-off scores and to eliminate forced placement that takes control away from students. He argues that open access rather than forced placement is needed with more flexible advisement ranges rather than rigid cut-off scores, Also other aspects of placing students in developmental programs should be used and made more effective - such as tutoring, career and personal counseling, mentoring, etc.

Another problem in using current tests for placement in reading courses is that although researchers have warned that remedial programs are inefficient and ineffective in the absence of specific diagnoses of difficulties. many of today's tests neither diagnose nor reflect the reality of college study. (Utterback, 1989).There is also evidence that without diagnosis, students' weakness are not addressed in developmental reading courses (Kerstiens 1978).

The misuse of standardized tests of reading placement has a long history- and some colleges continue to disregard basic psychometric principles - as for example, when the SAT or ACT (which are norm-referenced tests of scholastic aptitude) are used inappropriately to place students in developmental courses.

Newer tests, including customized computerized placement and instruction programs, attempt to minimize test taking skills and reflect students' reading skills more accurately. On example, the TASP (Texas Academic Skills Program) Test is untimed so that students can take up five hours to complete its three parts. Reading passages on the TASP are much longer and better reflect college reading tasks. (Personal e-mail communication from Don Garnett, August 13, 1997). Although the TASP offers more alternatives including classes as well as individualized services, students are still required to participate and pass the post-test before they can take advanced college courses.

Teaching to the Test

Another negative effect of using standardized reading tests is that they encourage teachers to teach to the test and reinforce their adherence to

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traditional methods (Wood, 1997) She says that reading teachers who feel obligated to demonstrate gains on traditional multiple choice tests will have a difficult time abandoning these methods and this is especially true of those working with poor readers in situations where testing/remedial courses are mandated. Traditional method are easier to teach and more predictable to follow ; teachers don't have to relinquish their authority."In traditional teaching, the teacher's knowledge is privileged while in modern methods, the student's knowledge is privileged."(Wood, 1997, p. 91)

What can be done about reading tests?

Although we feel that placement in reading should be voluntary, we feel that testing should be mandatory. Too many students, especially those who most need assessment, will avoid it wherever possible. (Morante , 1994, p. 121);but reading tests should only be used when counseling and advisement services are available. Reading tests are best used to indicate where student should start a reading program, not to brand them "poor learners." Test scores should be one of the factors students use in deciding which courses they need. Although multiple criteria rather than cut-off scores have long been recommended, only a few programs are using multiple criteria either for placement or for on going diagnosis in their reading courses.

For example, Peers (1993) describes a performance based placement assessment that integrates reading and writing as a diagnostic tool, She required students to read three articles on Water Problems in California. learn about the problem, devise a solution for it, and present their solution in written form to a specified audience. She looked at three aspects of the process the methods used, to what extent would a controlled structured assignment help them focus and organize their information and what scoring criteria would be appropriate. Specifically, she looked at the information gained from reading, accuracy of information and appropriate selection of information; control of content task accomplishment, developing a paper, organization of material and control of language that is, - word choice, sentence variety, and grammar and mechanics.

Simpson & Nist (March 1992) have developed a comprehensive assessment model that reflects current reading research and theory, is appropriate to the philosophy and goals of their program, and is unique to their university and students They use a multidimensional assessment involving a variety of formal and informal instruments that sort, diagnose and evaluate. Changes are made as the student progress so the assessment becomes an integral part of the instruction and shapes decisions about materials, tasks, pacing and feedback in future lessons.

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Also this approach involves students in diagnosing their own problems and evaluating their own progress.

THE STIGMA OF FORCED PLACEMENT

In education as in legal situations, there is a fine line between remediation and punishment and sometimes a given action can be both.

Educators and policy makers underestimate how much students feel stigmatized when they are forced to take a developmental college reading course, Further this humiliation affects the attitudes of their reading instructors too, who sometimes feel like second-class citizens in their college.

College students perceive taking a required remedial reading course as more shameful and punitive than taking similar courses in writing and mathematics, perhaps because people associate learning to read with what one learns in first grade. Or perhaps, being forced to take a college reading course is more painful because unlike math and writing, reading courses do not fit into any discipline or department - indeed reading skill underlies them all. At any rate, the stigma of taking a course for dummies serves as a major deterrent for aspiring college students with poor reading skills. Labeling the course as remedial or developmental worsens the problem.

As Urie Triesman, the mathematician, is quoted as saying, about math courses, "Call them intensive, call them honors courses, call them anything, but don't call them remedial!." I'd add "and don't call them reading!" However, not only are reading courses identified as remedial, sometimes they are labeled as "reading for those who read below the 8th grade level." What a put-down for an adult! At least Triesman takes his own advice and calls his math seminars , "The Developing Scholars' Program."

The shame of being forced to take a developmental reading course lowers expectations, increases resistance and makes students even more difficult to teach. Being labeled dumb can destroy self-confidence and have long lasting effects on students' self-image. When we assign students to a remedial course, we are , in effect, committing those who don't meet our expectations to an intellectual ghetto in hopes that they won't contaminate the rest of the students. Indeed, most developmental reading courses isolate the students from other students and from the rest of the college curriculum. And the effects of the negative label endure. Astin (1993) found that having been tutored was negatively related to scores on a graduate

record examination taken years later. Being labeled as needing help lingers on while the experience of having been a tutor was positively related to later graduate exam scores.

Dimon (1991) suggests that instead of asking the question of whether taking a reading skills course improves the student's chance of success, we should investigate the possible frustration and loss of self-esteem which accompanies any remedy (like a reading course) that does not produce the desired results. (Dimon, p. 73).

In follow-up interviews with high risk students who completed a reading course Dimon found that students generally gave the course poor ratings and most said that it had not helped them. None rated the reading course as their favorite, and although they complained about not being able to understand the content of some of the mainstream courses they were taking, they didn't believe that their reading skill was the problem. In fact, taking general education courses like English composition or the communications course their first semester increased high risk students' self esteem- while completing a reading and study skills course did not (p. 166.).

Knowing that administrators, politicians, and indeed the general public complain that they are paying twice to teach skills that should have been learned in high school doesn't add to a student's self confidence. But what the policy makers fail to realize is that improving reading skills is a continuous process that varies with the discipline as one moves through school. In other words, the reading skills needed to pass freshman literature probably won't get you through law school or medical school nor will fourth grade skills get you through college. Furthermore, students' motivation and feelings of self-efficacy play a large part in their willingness to study, and their eventual success or failure in college.

Are College Reading Teachers Adequately Prepared?

Many of the problems with developmental reading courses seem to stem from the fact that reading teachers may be unaware of the reading demands of college faculty in other disciplines nor do they feel it important. Convinced that their students are unable to read textbooks. they don't try to teach them how, but concentrate on "basic skills." Furthermore, reading teachers usually lack training or experience in working with adults, and may be uninformed about current theory, research, and practice in the college reading field. Since there are few graduate training programs for college reading specialists, most learn on the job.

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College reading teachers rarely , if ever come from the ranks of college professors but are usually chosen from local public school reading or English teachers, who may have been trained to teach elementary or high school students but who lack experience in teaching adults. They know little about what different faculty members mean by academic literacy in their fields, what faculty expect students to learn, or the criteria they use to assess student progress. Although reading teachers have been college students themselves they may have very limited knowledge about the skills necessary to read genres outside of their own college majors - usually English or education.

Since more than half of today's college students are over age 22, Friedman (1997) stresses the importance of teachers' having training in adult education so that they can understand the unique characteristics that adult learners bring to the developmental classroom. An understanding of the basic principles of androgogy such as the importance of teacher self awareness in working with adults and its implications for instruction are important as are the differences between adult and children's learning needs. They should be also be aware that the techniques they use in teaching children won't work with adults.

As Friedman points out , adults tend to be independent and self-directed learners -and have had many experiences that younger students lack, and college teachers should focus on their special problems; evoke genuine examples—in other words, invoke androgogy.

In addition, many college reading teachers are part-time or adjunct teachers which limits their financial ability and their opportunities to get further education. The degrees and training in reading that a reading teacher may have earned in the past may well be out of date as will as her philosophy of reading and her teaching strategies.

Teacher's Attitudes

The results of a survey of college reading instructors who attended a professional meeting showed that they disagreed about the definition of reading and they did not agree about what should be taught in a reading course (Dimon 1993). Many teachers said they regard reading as a skill yet believe in teaching it as a separate subject worthy of inclusion in college catalogs (Dimon, p. 77).The majority agreed that the reading class should not focus on the content of other courses that students might be taking. But all heavily supported continuing existing reading and study skills classes and were unwilling to support any decrease in the number of reading classes should their college face budget cuts.

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Although most teachers said they preferred teaching "reading improvement" courses over teaching study techniques, none of them preferred to teach vocabulary development as it relates to college textbooks Only a small percent of teachers were willing to focus on subject matter, content areas, or what students bring to a given college course.

It is clear that different college reading courses in different institutions focus on quite different goals - Some hold that college reading assumes a higher degree of literacy than high school work. and that college reading demands are much more specific--requiring that students be competent in reading the different kinds of academic textbooks and other materials assigned in college classes. In other words, teaching students to read newspaper and magazine articles is not enough. (Bohr, 1996, Cohen & Quinn, 1996;Burrell & others, 1997).

Many teachers seem to believe that their goal is to focus on basic skills - with the aim of getting students up to the twelfth grade level in reading or as close to it as possible. It may be that some college reading teachers, at least those in community colleges, need training in phonics and how to teach beginning literacy skills (Kerstiens, 1978), but it is crucial that all understand that the goal is to train students for academic literacy (Bohr, 1994-5).

The recently proposed IRA/ NCTE Standards on Language Arts call for a broader definition of literacy to include listening, and computers literacy, and the use of alternatives to the standardized test- subskills driven curriculum; however, they have had little effect on college reading teachers - many of whom still cling to traditional methods and textbooks.

PROBLEMS WITH READING COURSES

As we've pointed out. today's developmental reading courses have many problems including teachers who are unprepared to teach adults and often have a limited knowledge of current theories and practices in teaching reading. Compounding these difficulties are teachers who adhere to out of date reading texts, don't assign enough reading or writing and don't teach students how to apply newly acquired reading skills to their mainstream course work.

New Reading Theory and Research

Since the nineteen seventies, new theories and research in psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology (Smith, 1994) have changed

our understanding of the reading process, they have made little different to college programs - developmental reading courses remain much as they have always been. Nancy Wood (Spring,1997) contrasts the traditional way of teaching developmental reading based on behaviorist theory with today's modern model, based on psycholinguistic theory.

She explains that one result of the impact of traditional behaviorist theory, on reading was that experts began to divide reading into skills and subskills under the belief that if students improved in the subskills they would become stronger readers and that they could transfer reading skills learned on one set of practice material, to their textbooks. - furthermore reading was thought to be a linear process so that one progressed from easier skills like reading for facts to the more complex skill of critical reading. We now know that reading is discipline specific and skills learned in one genre may or may not transfer to other academic fields.

Today, most authorities no longer believe that meaning lies in the text and that the teacher's job is to see that students get the author's meaning. Psycholinguistic theory argues that reading and writing are modes of learning and share common purposes and processes. That is, they are ways that students construct meaning or ways of thinking and knowing. Reading involves an interaction between a learner's prior knowledge, text and context and reading and writing are viewed as a single act of literacy that should be taught together. (Quinn, 1994).

Traditionally, college reading teachers focused on teaching reading skills through drills on graded paragraphs and exercises on cards , but we recognize now that it is important that the academic support curriculum be directly relevant to the courses freshmen are taking. Walter & others (1989) state it well, "For many years it was common practice for reading and study skills courses to use standardized materials and texts such as the SRA Better Reading Books and the survey part of the Diagnostic Reading Test. It was assumed that once freshmen were trained to master reading strategies with these materials, they would apply them to their own course assignments. Unfortunately, what many freshmen learned in these study skills courses did not generalize to their day-to-day reading and studying. When they learn reading skills by directly applying them to their own texts , completing their own assignments more efficiently, they are likely to continue to use the new approach to reading" (p. 111).

The Skills Approach as an End in Itself Lingers On.

Reading course descriptions inevitably list vocabulary, word attack, and comprehension skills . In analyzing the content of California community

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college reading and study skills courses, Dimon (1993) reported that they begin by giving poor readers training in materials below the 6th grade level. "When student feel comfortable with reading sixth grade essays or stories, they are advanced to intermediate-level reading courses where the scenario repeats itself with more difficult material," (Dimon p. 71). She concludes that in general, teachers make no effort to relate reading skills to textbook reading in the other courses the students are taking

If developmental courses give students nothing important to read about and nothing to write about that remotely resembles college work -- how can they hope to improve? Dimon ,after observing the materials used in community college reading classes, wrote, "Those who teach reading skills courses seem to believe that practice of any kind makes perfect, but can real practice be effective without real purpose?" (Dimon,1993, p. 73)

Bohr (1994-1995) examined general freshmen courses that were associated with reading gains when initial ability was controlled in students enrolled in three different types of . four-year colleges. She reported that taking a developmental reading courses did not improve students' reading scores, but the courses that contributed most significantly to gains in reading ability were applied science and humanities courses, especially English literature and composition courses (as expected) but also freshmen classes in engineering, music, and foreign language.

The limited amount of reading assigned in most reading courses may explain why students taking required courses in general education subjects like freshman composition improve their reading skills even when they don't take a reading course (Bohr, 1994-95, Dimon, 1997, Tarabon, 1997). Students in engineering drawing, music or foreign languages improve their reading skills significantly; those taking developmental reading don't (Bohr 1994-95). I suspect these mainstream courses are more rigorous than reading classes and require not only more effort during class but lots of homework, while students in reading courses may get by with doing short exercises with few outside assignments.

Bohr's results raise troubling questions about the effectiveness of college developmental reading courses beyond the broad questions about the validity of reading tests. Do students fail to improve in reading because they feel they are labeled unteachable by being placed in a developmental course thus lowering their motivation and expectations ? Do the reading instructors have low expectations and place minimal demands on their students? Or is failure to improve reading skills due to the nature of the courses (are they too easy, not challenging enough; don't require enough

"time on task" or do they over-stress methodology rather than empowering students to monitor and control their own reading efforts, ? (Maxwell, 1997).

How does college reading differ from reading instruction in lower grades?

Bohr (1996) points out that reading instruction in elementary grades prepares readers for all reading; college reading instruction is limited to helping students succeed in college- that is it involves academic literacy and not general literacy

The teacher's definition of reading also affects student motivation. If she believes that reading is a process, not a discipline, she realizes that students don't come to college expecting to major in reading and resent having to take sequences of non-credit reading courses. Poor readers differ from their better prepared classmates in degree - their skills are weaker but they are capable of improving (Tarabon, 1996).

Different Courses Require Students to Read Different Types of Academic Genres for Different Purposes.

Students who have never learned to read for their own purposes usually have great difficulty reading for other people's purposes and some suggest that getting into the habit of reading for one's self should precede reading for other people's purposes. (Henry, 1996). Certainly many poor readers don't read for pleasure.

David Caverly suggests that we should be teaching students to read to satisfy various masters: standardized tests (if that be one master), course requirements (a necessary master), and reading task demands of other college courses where reading is peripheral (read if you want, but I am going to tell you what is in the book anyway), supportive (read and confirm what I am saying in my lectures), or vital (read and share in class your understanding). Any developmental program must prepare students for all of these masters. If it prepares for one, it is not doing the students justice. (e-mail message from David Caverly, 7/19/97)

There's Not Enough Reading in College Reading Courses.

Aliterate students (those who can read but don't and rarely, if ever, read books) need total immersion in an intensive reading experience to become the fluent, habitual readers that characterize successful college students. Unfortunately what they receive in developmental reading courses may be too little and too late (Henry, 1995).

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Developmental reading teachers often complain that they can't assign homework or give extra work to students who don't get credit for the course because their students refuse to do it. To be sure, some reading teachers do emphasize intensive reading such as Nist & Hynd (1994) whose students engage in sustained silent reading on their reading assignments during their lab class or Henry (1995) whose course stresses free reading during class time, but these are exceptions. Henry uses a whole language approach reminiscent of the "Hooked on Books" movement popularized by David Fader and colleagues in the 60s and 70s that aimed at turning non-readers into readers at the junior high school level by focusing on their reading interests, not those of the teacher (Fader &McNeil, 1968). Apparently, Fader's junior high movement had few lasting effects since we find teachers still using the same approach with college students.

Out-of-date Reading Textbooks Restrict What Teachers Offer

The reading textbooks and materials used in college reading courses may also limit their effectiveness of reading courses. Gene Kerstiens warned about the problems of community college reading courses in 1979, when he pointed out that the objectives as well as the methodologies applied in most developmental reading courses hadn't changed in forty-eight years. Teachers and textbooks still emphasized the same skills: comprehension, vocabulary, reading rate and study skills. One factor may be that new, untrained instructors usually choose the same text as was used last term and if students complain, search around for an easier text. Or those instructors into cyberspace start flooding the Internet listserves about six weeks before classes start with questions about what text to use in "X" reading class. Few seem to plan reading activities or assignments around the other classes a student is taking.

Despite the fact that more than 500 reading textbooks have been published since the 1890s, Stahl, Simpson, & Brozo(1988) in a review of content analyses of reading textbook discovered that authors who write college reading textbooks tend to ignore the research on verbal cognitive development. Their books rarely deviate from the same old patterns of earlier texts: they use the same kinds of exercises and apparently choose topics based on marketing surveys rather than on theory and/or research.

Wood (1997) found a little improvement when in her review of twenty popular reading texts which she classified as traditional, modern, or mixed. Her criteria to classify texts as modern included the variety of passages used including those from text and multicultural passages, whole language

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approach using real reading, strategy exercises in place of skills and drills , predicting questions, collaborative exercises, writing to learn activities, assessing reading at different stages, and placing more emphasis on critical reading and critical thinking than more traditional texts do. She classified books that contained mainly skills/drill activities as traditional. Of the 20 texts she rated, eight as tradition, eight as modern, and four as mixed. Thus Wood's content analysis shows that authors of reading text books are slow to update their materials and implies that 40% or more of the reading courses may still focus primarily on skills-based exercise.

Most experts agree that :"The value of training materials depends on their ability to teach freshmen to perform course-related tasks successfully. Often it is better to design special exercises based on the actual course text than to use commercial materials" (Walter et al 1989, p 12), yet still the numbers of reading textbooks that ignore college content proliferate and continue to sell.

Successful Courses

Certainly the quality of reading courses varies immensely - on the one hand there are highly successful reading courses such as those offered at the University of Georgia and at Middle Tennessee State University, but they seem to be the exception rather than the rule. On the other hand, there are still some that would fit Traub's account of a of a developmental course at CCNY which he describes as having the ambience of an oncology ward. The problem is, however, that most don't demonstrate that they help students read better or make better grades in college.

POOR READERS

Poor readers tend to underestimate how important and how difficult college reading requirements are. They reason that because they have passed high school courses with"D's they'll be able to do the same in college. Or they may hate to read and have avoided it or still carry the scars of earlier unhappy academic experiences and low self-efficacy about school work. They need much more than a reading course to orient them to the realities of college.

Some developmental students in open-admission schools may be reading a great deal below college level -i.e., below the 6th grade level. Some may be non-readers, but even those who can read may have very restricted reading experiences. Further, they may have had minimal exposure to reading textbooks because there were not enough textbooks in high school to allow them to take books home.

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In community colleges in Texas for instance most students who need remediation in reading are not taking college level courses at the same time and where there are three tiers of reading classes. Teachers find that poorest readers find the reading workbooks that simulate textbook chapters too difficult and don't understand how demanding college texts really are. Only the top classes - not the intermediate or low readers can handle reading workbooks with exercises that approximate college textbook-such as McGraw 's or McWhorter's.

So what can you do if you are teaching a course for poor readers who are not permitted to take regular college courses until they complete your reading course. There are still intellectually honest ways to teach them using simulated pre-college level or college-related content but it takes a great deal of effort, planning, and skill. However, having them also enrolled in a mainstream course is certainly more motivating since it enables students to immediately apply the reading and study strategies they are learning.

So in teaching at-risk students who aren't quite ready to read college textbooks, you have a dual task, acculturating them to the real reading demands of college as well as helping them develop the vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking skills they will need to succeed in mainstream courses. Even then some teachers have discovered that it is better to use realistic college course materials than easier exercises. (Kasper, 1995-1996) had ESL students read selections from psychology texts (even though they were not taking a psychology course). She taught them the vocabulary and discussed the textbook concepts with them. Students made greater gains in reading and were better satisfied with the "real college"material. than those taking traditional ESL courses.

Another strategy is to use a simulation model which replicates the tasks and texts of a typical required lower division course (Stahl, Simpson, & Hayes 1992 p. 3) although students may complain that this approach is dull and difficult. However, It's better to use sections from a real college textbook or to pair your reading and study skills course with a regular course even if it's one like Introduction to Computers that requires little outside reading.

Historically, the most successful model for high risk students who enter college with limited reading skills involves a core of intensive, interdepartmental courses that are team taught and include reading, writing, mathematics and a mainstream course (usually in social science.)

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Counseling is a key component and is integrated into the content courses (Obler & others 1977; Clark, 1987; Roueche & Roueche, 1993).

Also, recent studies show that high risk students who are poor readers respond well to courses where content and skills are paired as in Supplemental Instruction (SI) or adjunct skills classes, (Dimon, 1991; Garland, 1987; Ramirez. 1993; Ramirez, 1996.). In fact, Ramirez in a ten year follow-up study of high risk students who took SI found that students with the poorest grade averages in high school made greater grade improvement than their better prepared peers in the SI classes. The new, Video-based Supplemental Instruction (VSI) has also had dramatic effects on underprepared students with poor ACT scores, low high school percentile ranks, and even those on academic probation who made higher final course grades, more A, B, & C grades, fewer D's & F's than a group of average students who did not take VSI (University of Missouri-Kansas City, March 1997).

SUMMARY

As we have discussed above, the traditional required remedial reading course has many short-comings: students are stigmatized by forced placement and resent the course, drop-out rates are higher and high risk students who take the course take longer to complete degrees and take longer to shed the high-risk label. The skills taught tend to be speed, vocabulary, and comprehension- taught in traditional ways and are often unrelated to those needed to understand college textbooks. Also college reading teachers may be untrained in modern theory and research, lack skills in teaching adults and usually aren't knowledgeable about what other faculty members consider academic literacy (Burrell and others, Spring, 1997, Cohen & Quinn, 1995). Courses are rarely systematically evaluated so there's no incentive to change topics, or the way they are taught. And the most damning of all - there is little evidence of their value in improving reading skills or college success.

Possible solutions:

Students need testing, counseling, and advising and mentoring so they understand what is necessary for college success. Those who need to improve their reading should be given a choice of different programs rather than being sectioned into compulsory courses based on a low test score.

The best solution is to integrate reading, writing and study skills directly into content courses. Rutgers' Gateway Program does this for underprepared freshmen who take an additional skills lab course along with their mainstream course such as psychology - learning skills

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specialists co-teach the skills lab, but both lab and course are offered under the aegis of the academic department.

An ever increasing number of studies show that course-related skills programs like adjunct skills (Dimon, 1994); Supplemental instruction -- (Blanc & others. 1985; Martin & Arendale 1992; Martin & Arendale, 1994; and Martin & Arendale, Winter, 1994). and paired courses (Gabelnick & others, 1990: Tinto, & others, 1990; Bullock & others;1987: Resnick 1993; Luvas-Briggs, 1987)-- effectively raise students' course grades, result in higher grade-point-averages, and improve retention and graduation rates

[Note: There's an Annotated Supplemental Instruction Bibliography that has about 320 citations posted to the SI homepage. Address:
http://www.umkc.edu/centers/cad/si/sidocs/sibib97.htm

Also there are about 100 other articles on SI available through the SI homepage. http://www.umkc.edu/cad/si.htm]

What reading teachers need to do.

Drawing on research that examines the impact of different types of reading and writing activities have on comprehension and learning, Quinn (1995). suggests that teachers can design innovative curriculum and teaching strategies in reading and writing for learning which combine language activities and rely on their interaction for learning. For example, extended analytical writing, note-taking during and after reading show that these influence learning in different ways and summary writing enhances learning as does extended analytical reading.

Tasks that require reading, note taking, annotation, summarizing, discussion, analysis, revision, review separately and in different combinations are critical if students are to use reading and writing as models of learning. (p. 24)
Tasks that promote a metacognitive awareness of the different reading, and writing roles students adopt when reading and writing in different contexts need to be encouraged as does the recognition of how the diverse language, literacy, and learning experiences affect their success in learning academic discourse.

Quinn summarizes "By committing to a content-based literacy program which actively engages students in learning how to use purposeful, self-directed reading and writing strategies for learning across disciplines, I believe college reading and writing teachers are well placed to lead in efforts to promote reading and writing as modes of learning (p. 26).

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Because of their insularity college reading teachers have generally been excluded from the current Writing Across the Curriculum and Content Based Reading that offer promise as do discipline specific literacy strategies for learning content. (Quinn 1995).

Why Not Revive Preparatory Programs?

Another solution is to revive intensive college preparatory programs that were commonly offered by state universities prior to the 1930s and are still available in private preparatory schools or the military academy prep schools. Preparatory courses should offer basic skills that are fully integrated with the content that is pre-requisite for college courses.

Core Courses in Summer Bridge Programs.

The core programs mentioned earlier that offer team taught, interdisciplinary courses including reading, writing, and a mainstream course is another alternative, particularly for poor readers, and can be offered as a summer bridge program.

In fact, as the evidence mounts, one can only conclude that successful developmental students (and they tend to be the more highly motivated, older students) succeed despite having taken a required reading course, not because of it.

We agree with Dimon's (1993) recommendation that funds that presently support reading and study skills courses should be redirected toward programs that help students succeed in their general education courses through combining skills and college content through the many effective course-related programs we have today.

Isn't it time that colleges redirected their time, effort and money to programs that help students succeed in their college courses rather than perpetuating reading courses that waste both the students' and the institution's time and money?

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